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BOOKS  
IN THEIR  
SEASONS  
MARBLE



The author's first book?

3<sup>rd</sup>

books and reading

showing

With loving remembrances,  
Annie Russell Marks

Worcester, 1905.

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Marble



# BOOKS IN THEIR SEASONS

BY

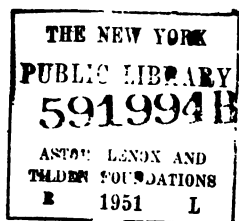
ANNIE RUSSELL MARBLE

"To everything there is a season, and a time to  
every purpose under the heaven."

— ECCLESIASTES, iii, 1.

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## BOOKS IN THEIR SEASONS

"How many things by season season'd are  
To their right praise and true perfection !"

— *Merchant of Venice*, v. 1.

HAVE you had recent occasion to consult the card-catalogue of a large library under the general theme of books? If so, you have noted, with a sense of mental weariness, the scores and scores of books about books, advice under direct and subtle titles on "What to Read," "Books for Ministers of the Gospels," "Books for the Young," and numerous selected lists of "The Best One Hundred Books for General Readers." This abundant and gratuitous counsel on the choice of books is almost equalled by directions "How to Read," "How to Economize Time in Reading," and many sign-boards showing cross-country paths to mental and spiritual culture. Too much advice, however sage, becomes burdensome and often reacts in reckless independence. The inevitable result of so much solicitude regarding *what* and *how* one shall read, so much dogmatism with



scanty allowance for individual tastes and gradual development, has been to arouse a spirit of defiance on the part of many readers towards prescribed rules and approved lists. This resentment against the imperative mood in what should be a pleasure, this disposition to break away from wise doctors and test our own inclinations for a time, has been wittily voiced by Miss Repplier in revolt at "a list of books of which I dare say I stand in open need, but which I am naturally indisposed to consider with much kindness, thrust upon me as they are, like paregoric or a porous plaster" ("Essays in Miniature," p. 15).

While there is such a profusion of tracts on the proper books and methods of reading, slight emphasis has been placed upon an equally important thought, — When shall we read certain books, with what environment and mood of humanity, with what seasons of nature will they best affiliate and produce true harmony between author and reader? That mental comrade, so dear to Goldsmith and Thackeray, *The Gentle Reader*, has been revived for our emulation by Dr. Crothers. ("The Gentle Reader," 1903). We need to renew acquaintance with this genial, sympathetic ideal who ever read for enjoyment, not for percentages of profit, who awakened in his author a feeling of affection, not the

attitude of resentment or cringing apology, which is frequently called forth by the superficial or censorious readers of the present. The Gentle Reader is a delightful model. He is akin to the portraits of the Gentleman and Gentlewoman of the Old School, so happily painted in rhyme by Austin Dobson. The type of reader, however, who is more in accord with the needs and surroundings of present life is The Sane Reader. He may be gentle, he will always aim to be responsive, he must be judicious in both indulgence and self-denial. Nearly two and one-half centuries ago that kindly, wise narrator of "The Worthies of England" (Thomas Fuller, 1662,<sup>1</sup> i. 42) wrote "A Just Complaint of the Numerosity of Needless Books." The Sane Reader to-day, amid the depressing affluence, will first of all apply Carlyle's imagery and separate all books into "Sheep and Goats." Such is only a preliminary process. The "sheep" are so numerous, so tempting in their attractive covers, so varied in their appeals to tastes and moods, that dismay seizes one at the thought of ever reading any large proportion of the worthy books of the past, while "to keep in touch" with current literature suggests a race between a slow pedestrian and an automobile at full speed. Many a college graduate, with innate

love for books, which has not been stifled by the analytic methods of "studying literature," looking over a list of "one hundred books which every one should read," is obliged to confess, if he is perfectly frank, not alone that some of them are unfamiliar to him in their entirety, but also that there are others which he has not the slightest desire to read. Why are we ashamed to confess such conditions? It often happens that the very books which we regarded with indifference or as positive bores in youth or early manhood have become our dear companions in later life. Reading should be regulated by seasons of growth in the outer world and in our inner natures. Was not this the meaning of Emerson, — "The best rule of reading will be a method from nature, and not a mechanical one of hours and pages?"

Leaving out of consideration academic or professional research for the time, and restricting himself to such reading as will conduce to nurture or enjoyment, the sane reader of our vision will choose as carefully *when* to read as *what* to read. He will know when all books should be refused, when mind and nerves may be rested and benefited by abstinence alone. He will await the process of assimilation, he will recognize the claims of other faculties than the mental. Recall the quatrain of Thoreau,

a true lover of books no less than a seer of nature :—

“Tell Shakespeare to attend some leisure hour,  
For now I've business with this drop of dew,  
And see you not the clouds prepare a shower?—  
I'll meet him shortly when the sky is blue.”

The statesman, Charles Fox, said with truth, “Nothing is more delightful than to lie under a tree in summer with a book, except to lie under a tree in summer without a book.” We may carry a magazine or a volume as we saunter along the seashore or sit upon the rocks; but if the sanity of our natures is in full control, reading is neglected as the waves sing around us and the hazy, sail-dotted horizon satisfies and rests the eye and mind as no master-lore could possibly achieve. We feel annoyance toward our travelling neighbor who so lacks all æsthetic response as to bury himself in a book or a newspaper while we cross grand mountain gorges, are carried through seething river rapids, or within the inlets and expanses of some beautiful lake. Tramping for bird study or in quest of wild flowers, we take a book of information on the first walk but later find it only a burden. Senses and intuitions are our best teachers in the open, and we can verify our limited knowledge and examine minutely our treasures by textual aids in the later indoor hours. Mon-

taigne well knew the joys of renunciation as well as of comradeship with books: "I never travel without books either in peace or war, and yet sometimes I pass over several days and sometimes months without looking in them. For it is not to be imagined to what a degree I please myself and rest content in this consideration, that I have them by me, to divert myself with them when I am so disposed and to call to mind what an ease and refreshment they are to my life" ("Essays," chap. 97).

Without frequent excursions into book-land our years would be barren of many mental and spiritual impulses, we would lose much joy in living. There are times, however, when our trained minds and wills should lead us away from the printed page into the quietude of the woods and fields; there are seasons when a walk alone in the country, without physical or mental companions, is the only real panacea for tired nerves and baffled soul. In the hours of our deepest grief or most heart-rending struggle, "forspent with love and shame," the trees will work out their healing ministry for us as they did for the Master; we come out again into life's ambitions and turmoil, "content with death and shame."

The right books have magnetic power to stimulate anew the worn tissues of heart and mind, to

fill our souls with a childlike faith, to give poise and joy to our relationship with life, but their success in attaining such results is slow in comparison with the immediate effects of a brisk walk amid autumn foliage, a stroll in the spring meadows vocal with birds and aglow with flowers, or an hour of quiet reverie, on one of the "full-starr'd nights."

Granted that the sane reader will reject all books at certain times, he will also exclude from his chosen circle many worthy volumes at all times. In general society we meet hundreds of agreeable people, gifted and influential, but we do not attempt to include any large number of these among our intimate friends. As the years pass our intimates become fewer and the old friends, though seldom seen, have prior claims upon our sympathies and our time. With the same judgment which one applies in choosing actual friends, those adapted to congenial tastes or special environment, one should select such writings, in their fitting season, as will increase one's service and joy in life. Mr. Frederic Harrison has aptly said, "It is impossible to get any method in our reading till we get nerve enough to reject." Advocating thus the need of temperance in the number of books to be read within a given period, the sane reader will also appreciate the value of select-

ing portions of certain books rather than reading them in bulk. To be sure, such a suggestion is contrary to the dictates of our grandfathers and may seem, at first thought, to foster surface reading. On the contrary, to read only relevant portions is quite distinct from "skimming." Too much of the latter tendency, defensible within certain limits but often becoming a vice, has been caused by the old-time fallacy that if one began a book he must finish it, however unsatisfactory or unwholesome it might prove to his tastes or his mood. Fortunately, this absurd, often harmful, notion has gone, in company with the analogous precept that a child should be compelled to finish all the food upon its plate, in spite of revulsion or satiety of outraged nature.

It would seem advisable for each individual to cull his own "Half Hours with the Best Authors" as opportunity or temperament may inspire, rather than devote a season to popular volumes of brief extracts chosen at random. No one would read all of Emerson's essays or Tennyson's poems in immediate sequence. They would lose all their varied stimulus if taken in such allopathic doses. When we have been thrilled by the pathos of "The Changing," how unwise to turn, in the same mood, to "The Biglow Papers," because they chance to

stand next in order in some editions of Lowell. Defiance to prescribed rules has often encouraged desultory reading, not as moods and needs may prompt, but as chance may dictate. We will not be urged to read certain books, we are indifferent about "improving our minds," we will show our independence by choosing at haphazard any volume of striking title, and so we waste time and mental or emotional energy in a fit of recklessness. Samuel Johnson said many wise words about reading, but some of his comments have been cruelly distorted when taken from their natural context. Among favorite quotations is this, "A man ought to read just as inclination leads him, for what he reads as a task will do him little good" (Boswell's "Johnson," i. 194). Such a sentence was never intended as an exhortation to mere aimless reading, as it is generally construed.

Along the same trend of thought is a suggestion by Dr. Johnson which deserves more than a passing smile ; it appeals strongly to one who is seeking so to choose his reading and plan his reading-time that he may best conserve his mentality and aid his natural, enjoyable growth. The thought is to adapt private libraries according to different periods and moods of life. Suppose for a single year we were to try a new experiment in arranging our library shelves and



tables. Suppose we should cease to classify our books according to sizes or by rigid rules in "sets," suppose we should even forego the temptation to arrange them in artistic contrasts of bindery, with the most ornate in the centre and the more simple and worn classics behind the doors or hinges. If, as a mere experiment, our books should be arranged according to their true relation in subject and impulse, we might gain some new light upon the real use and enjoyment of reading.

"The spare minute book" should be chosen with special care, for it often produces unexpected mental results. The first query that arises to-day is, Do we use any "spare minute books"? Do we not spend all our brief intervals, while waiting for business or social appointments, on journals and newspapers, in reading *about* books and authors rather than reading the books themselves? There are not a few men and women, in this age of multifold interests, to whom this mooted question will read, "When shall we find *any* time for reading?" To such, especially, must appeal the warning against desultory reading of some harmless but vapid story or page of gossip which may chance to lie close at hand. With foresight and wisdom, a relevant book may be ready for use for half an hour or even

less, — something which is stimulating or truly restful, as circumstances may require, but which will give delectable and nourishing food in small quantities and at infrequent periods, while it will furnish also a healthful mental tonic. Even if the immediate purpose of this book in question is to please our mood of incensancy by “killing time,” in the barbaric term of the day, that act of sacrifice should bring some compensation. Time is a commodity too much respected and coveted in these days of grace for wanton wasting, and the phrase implies some due economy in other ways. One of the most sane readers and most charming writers was Charles Lamb. No one has laid greater stress upon the thoughtful adjustment of a book to the time and surroundings when it is to be read. “Much depends upon *when* and *where* you read a book. In the five or six impatient minutes before the dinner is quite ready, who would think of taking up ‘The Fairy Queen’ for a stop-gag, or a volume of Bishop Andrewes’ sermons? Milton always requires a solemn service of music to be played before you enter upon him. But he brings his music, to which who listens had need bring docile thoughts and purged ears. Winter evenings, — the world shut out, — with loss of ceremony, the gentle Shakespeare enters. At

such a season 'The Tempest,' or his own 'Winter's Tale.'"

How few of our helpful books ever find a place upon library tables or desks within easy reach when a mood allures us and a few minutes offer! We display in conspicuous places the ornamental, the latest of "the ten best-selling books," that we may seem to our neighbors to be in the literary fashion. Here also is a beautiful Kelmscott, or a Roycroft, or an illustrated book of travel. Near them rests the Actor's Edition of some popular dramatized novel. These are the books which confront us, in too many cases, when the spare minutes come. Realizing their futility for our needs, we spend the limited time in glancing through the journals or ransacking the shelves for some volume which will satisfy our cravings of brain or heart. Would it be only a visionary benefit if, as each season of the year approaches, we should take down from their resting-places three or more volumes of prose and poetry which reflect nature's prevailing mood, and devote to them every day the few minutes which may be our only allowance? With the advent of spring and the return of the birds would it not be wise to include as our table companions, not alone some recent book by Mrs. Miller or Mr. Chapman, but also some older favorites that have

been long undisturbed upon the shelves, like White's "Selborne," Thoreau's "Walden," or Lowell's "My Study Windows," that we may sympathize anew with our garden acquaintances among the birds? Is autumn upon us? Recall Hood's "Ode to Autumn" and the many poetic tributes to the season by Wordsworth, Shelley, and Bryant. Take down from his long repose old Thomson, and read again his lines of serene reflection, or enjoy his graphic picture of the old-time harvester and his train.

In arranging this imaginary library table, there will be one book of serious trend, dealing with a sociological or scientific problem of the day, to supply food for the mind in its acquisitive moods; there will be some cheery volume of lighter essays for wearied or depressed hours; and at least two poets in harmony with the season, to stimulate fancy and prop up the waning ideals. There should be some wholesome story for refreshing the emotions. To satisfy the æsthetic qualities one would wish to have a single volume of rare artistic bindery. Such a list of books in general would be ready for service at any spare minute of the day or evening, and would stimulate, rest, or entertain, as the mood might suggest. After a lapse of time these books would be exchanged for others more appropriate to the months and

the fluctuations of the reader's tastes. Thus nearly all of the books upon our shelves, except those for reference or special research, would at some time become familiar to the eye and mind, and would be enabled to assert, in turn, their comradeship in our lives. Ruskin well knew the services which books will render if thus permitted — he declared that every book in his library was “a favorite in its own way and time.”

Many anathemas have been uttered against moods and their encouragement. It is customary to envy people of serene disposition, unhaunted by strong aspirings or deep gloom. With perfect candor we must confess that while such are restful household companions, they are often far less interesting than the persons of distinctive moods, who keep us expectant and animated. To encourage moodiness, — namely, the rapid and extravagant change of moods, without due control or regard for the comfort of others, — would be without justification. Such license is abnormal and debilitating to both the individual and his social circle. On the other hand, moods are as normal a process in human life as they are in nature. Within proper limits they should be indulged and trained. Nature is turbulent and sere as well as calm and sunshiny. She exhilarates and depresses; she has seasons of embryonic promise that are often delayed in

their fulfilment. She is at times capricious and even destructive in reaching her full development. We can best sympathize with these fluctuations of the outer world, we can understand our own faculties better with their flux and ebb, if we choose for reading what is in harmony with the prevailing mood of the outer or inner world, and what will tend, at the same time, to restore a sane relationship towards life, if we have allowed our moods to overbalance reason and produce extremes of thought or feeling, or permitted our imagination to approach hallucination or vagaries.

With no thought of dogmatism, but as a pleasurable excursion along the by-paths of literature, suppose we illustrate these outlines of a plan whereby our reading may accord with the true opportunities of time and place. Eliminating all volumes which belong to the resources of the student, *per se*, we may say that the reader should classify and associate in his memory one group of books which will clarify and inform his brain, another group which will awaken and train his imagination, a third to inspirit his heart and soul, and a last group to afford pleasure to his tastes and effortless enjoyment in his recreative hours. Unless the mind has become atrophied from lack of exercise, there often comes to the book-lover a deep

craving for mental food, for such reading as will scatter lethargy and vagueness, for such books as will turn the mind away from personal distractions and frettings into a definite line of thought. Henry Vaughan saw the cure for such conditions when he apostrophized "To His Books" (i. 297-298):—

"Bright books! the perspectives to our weak sights ;  
The clear projections of discerning lights !"

The reader whose brain is jaded, not by excessive study but by lack of creative thought and the burden of petty worries, knows that an hour, or even a half hour, with concentrated thought upon the right pages, will accomplish much in regaining mental poise, in clearing away the fogs, in giving renewed vigor to the mind akin to the glow which follows exercise for the body. Many of the greatest statesmen of the past and present, in the midst of agitating affairs, have recognized this need and shown its sure benefits. Augustus and Napoleon, Burke and Fox, Gladstone and Balfour, Roosevelt and Hay, — such names suggest men who have cleared away mental perplexities and relaxed nervous tension by burying themselves for a few moments, when time allowed, in some old favorite or some new, absorbing book.

In this mood of mental hunger we crave

reading of more serious trend, not too disputatious nor yet too easeful, for it must magnetize as well as refresh the mental faculties. The world's great essayists, from Marcus Aurelius to Bacon and Macaulay, will never fail to satisfy. Plutarch's "Lives" are perennial in their appeal to varied tastes. At such times we make most perfect response to the presentation of some new material dealing with current problems of science, government, or society, like "Character Building" or "Americans in Process," "Studies in Evolution" or "The Life of the Bee," "The Web of Empire" or "Letters from Japan." Faithful and poised biographies can absorb our interest, even for brief periods at a time, can widen our range of sympathies and relieve the pressure of personal minutiae. To forget ourselves or to realize anew our own possibilities in reading lives like those of Huxley and Romanes, Stevenson, Max Müller, or Parkman, is to bring into harmony *what* and *when* to read.

If one is in doubt regarding the new books and is baffled more than assisted by many of the reviews, the old companions are ever reliable and their stimulus is close at hand. How vacillating would we consider a person who was continually in quest of new associates and neglectful of the older friendships. Fifty years ago children read and reread and became incarnated



with the spirit of the few books that they knew. The characters were mental playmates and their authors were tried friends. To our grandfathers how strange would sound the common complaint of the present day, "Oh, I want some other book — I've read that one." This craze for new books, without careful choice of those best suited to experience or needs, is as marked among adults as among children. When mentally fatigued or hungry the fashion is to try some new "patent medicine" in literature which has been successfully advertised. It may excite for a time rather than accomplish that gradual nourishment which rebuilds even as it stimulates. The inevitable result of such indulgence has been well phrased by Lowell : —

"Reading new books is like eating new bread,  
One can bear it at first, but by gradual steps he  
Is brought to death's door of a mental dyspepsy."

Books of travel which have been written with faithfulness and philosophic purpose no less than with narrative skill, history of varied kinds, historical fiction which is literature, not mere bombast, novels of problematic trend by Tolstoy and Balzac, George Eliot, Mrs. Ward, and Judge Grant, all commend themselves to one who earnestly seeks for mental food. They are of equal service in the second mood suggested,

when the imagination would be aroused and given scope. This condition often coexists with that of the restless brain ; the same reading will recuperate both faculties. Change of mental scene, renewal of friendly relations with almost forgotten history and romance, — such means are often as inspiring as actual contact, after a long interval, with some boyhood comrade, who brings us an interesting tale of adventure.

Poetry is not alone the greatest stimulus for the imagination, but it is also victor in that final test of true literature, the ability to feed the heart and soul, to change daily life from mere routine into the higher "art of living." The statement has often been made that, in these days of action and criticism, no one really *loves* to read poetry. Many study it, more avoid it, few really enjoy it. The age that neglects poetry must become degenerate in imagination and soul. There are increasing aids for the *study* of poetry, annotated editions without number of poets of every age, from Dante and Chaucer to Keats and Lowell. Some of these devices are helpful, even desirable for the younger students, but they defeat their aim if they arouse only a temporary interest in the text and fail to inculcate a lifelong devotion to the singer and his song. No doubt the study of poetry has been carried to such an extreme as to threaten the spontaneous craving to

read poetry for pleasure. Again, the conditions of current life are so mercenary and impetuous that the word "poetry" seems irrelevant for the humor of the age. In the effort to simplify literature for younger readers, to assimilate as well as to prepare their food, we may have destroyed for the time that natural craving to select and puzzle out the meanings of the verse. In the past, children often gave false personal interpretations to certain lines, but they grasped more completely the spirit of the whole. Mr. Gerald Stanley Lee says, not without provocation, "If John Milton had had an idea when he wrote the little book called 'Paradise Lost' that it was going to be used mostly during the nineteenth century to batter children's minds with, it is doubtful if he would ever have had the heart to write it" ("The Lost Art of Reading," 1902, p. 63). It is not strange that Browning showed meagre enthusiasm over the many Browning clubs, with their dissecting modes. It is no great compliment to an author, nor does it imply sympathy with his higher motives, to insinuate that he requires a lexicon for every line. There is no grievous loss, especially to younger readers, if they fail to understand verbatim the meaning of each stanza and page, provided they grasp the message of the entire poem. "Macbeth" cannot reveal all its moral problems to an adolescent,

but the characters, the overweening ambition and the craven fear, the sequence of evil thought and deed, with the background of martial scenes, leave a lasting impression upon the youngest student. In later life he will recall the magnetic power of the drama and, in rereading, will probe to the secret of its subtleties. The parabolic teachings of "The Idylls of the King" are understood only by an adult mind after careful thought and study, of the earlier legends by Malory, but the general teachings of purity, gentleness, chivalry, and truth are reflected upon the heart of every child who reads the poems from a natural love of poetry.

Often an older reader finds some undiscovered grace or vital problem in a poem or a novel that has been familiar from childhood. Conversely, a child of normal impulses who reads by chance some mature book of lofty tone and strong characterization will miss the weightier messages of ethics or social science, but will gain an indelible impression of certain incidents that might pass almost unheeded or arouse only passing interest in an adult reader. To insure a love for poetry in later life, it is advisable to read the great world-poems to children, selecting such portions as they may best appreciate, and leaving the deeper lessons for time to engrave. Doggerel or so-called children's rhymes serve their

purpose for hours of recreation or bed-time lullabies, but the child has need of real food, not mere meringue for its imagination. The boy or girl, to whom is often read in childhood the story of the taking of Troy and the adventures of tempest-tost Ulysses, will find in the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," when he meets them in school-texts, old friends whom he will love in spite of their new difficulties of prosody and syntax. The child, when grown man or woman, who has delighted in the "Legend of St. George" and "Una," will love to read "The Faerie Queene." No adult imagination is properly nourished at the foundations unless it has been familiar with the legends of the Greek heroes, of the "Nibelungen hoard," and the bold, virile tales of the northern sagas.

"The Ancient Mariner" is a poem of such allegorical depth as to puzzle the most learned critics, but its difficulties affect in no way the delight of the child reader in its graphic fancy. The melody of "The Vision of Sir Launfal," with its matchless nature visions, has been enjoyed and memorized by many a child who has retained the lines through life but realized only in late maturity the full purport of the religious teaching. In the same way "Evangeline" and "Hiawatha" are, to the adult, not alone romantic poems but also ethnic studies; the child reader,

however, enters far more intimately into the poems. He sports with little Hiawatha with bow and arrow, joins him in his swirling dance, sympathizes with him in his love for Minnehaha and sorrow at her death, finds a new world of the past opened to him in the tales of Nokomis and the Arrow-Maker. Hawthorne fathomed the truth regarding children and their reading. Urged to "write down" to their mental levels, he retorted that he would rather "allow his theme to soar." He expressed in the preface to "Tanglewood Tales" a significant fact: "Children possess an unestimated sensibility to whatever is deep or high, in imagination or feeling, so long as it is simple likewise. It is only the artificial and the complex that bewilder them."

Study of an author should increase rather than destroy love for his work. It will accomplish this if the aim be interpretation and appreciation. The tendency of the present day is to overeducate the critical faculties, on the censorious bias, and to undervalue the powers of appreciation and joy. Too many text-books and teachers construe study of an author to mean riddling his structure with shot rather than entering by gradual, kindly steps into the sanctuary of his heart and soul. The true lover of literature who teaches analysis, or who seeks to read for his own interpretation, has an excellent

model in Ruskin, whose gracious illumination of the passage from "Lycidas" is familiar ("Sesame and Lilies," "Of Kings' Treasures").

If true love for poetry has been developed and has not been nullified, there are moods when

"We gloriously forget ourselves and plunge  
Soul-forward, headlong, into a book's profound,  
Impassioned for its beauty and salt of truth,  
'Tis then we get the right good from a book."

— *Aurora Leigh*, i. 718.

Not always are we in such soulful mood, however, even when we have most need of poetry. Often, in periods of deepest dejection, we shun all words which hold high the ideal before us, which offer encouragement and faith. Like children of younger and older years alike, we indulge ourselves in a mood of disappointment and bitterness, we yield fully to its demonic influence, finding almost a delight in being miserable ourselves and making others share our cynicism. In physical conditions analogous to these we force children to accept medicine or mental influences of brighter tone, and soon the remedy begins its salvage work. Much more necessary is such relief to "a mind diseased," for old and young alike are at times victims of temporary derangement. Few of us are wholly sane in all our moods. If we can, let us get into God's sunshine and do a kindly deed for some one

in actual want before whose misery and patience our own souls stand ashamed. Our exaggerated trials give way before a renewed sense of gratitude and courage. It is not always possible to thus literally "get out of ourselves" in contact with other lives. Often the mood of despond is a reaction from physical condition which shuts out all activity. Then the poets should enter with their messages of assurance and should be listened to until the disinclination passes into interest and interest into new visions of hope. The first care is to choose a poem which, in its first appeal, is in accord with our mood, which seems to understand our grief or gloom and will lead us away unconsciously from the danger paths of despond into a saner attitude towards life. Browning's "Saul" has brought many men and women to their nobler selves, has given them a new estimate of life and their own responsibilities and duties, as truly as David's harp soothed the frenzied soul of the king. Is life unbearable and are our hearts shriveled by some great loss in family or friendship? Then do we need to reread "In Memoriam" from first stanza to last, suffering with a personal shudder at the tenseness of grief of the earlier portions but pausing not until we reach and grasp, possibly only after many futile efforts, the note of a new consecration: —



"O living will that shalt endure  
When all that seems shall suffer shock,  
Rise in the spiritual rock,  
Flow thro' our deeds and make them pure,

"That we may lift from out of dust  
A voice as unto him that hears,  
A cry above the conquer'd years  
To one that with us works, and trust,

"With faith that comes of self-control,  
The truths that never can be proved  
Until we close with all we loved,  
And all we flow from, soul in soul." CXXXI.

If our standard has fallen prone, nothing can restore spiritual balance with more surety than a noble psalm or poem, or such poetic meditations as those of St. Augustine, Thomas à Kempis, Bunyan, or our own unappreciated Quaker apostle, John Woolman. Does life seem only drudgery and labor wearisome? Let us read some lines of courage and truth from Richard Burton's "Lyrics of Brotherhood" or from Dr. Van Dyke's buoyant message in "The Toiling of Felix:" —

"This is the gospel of Labour, — ring it, ye bells of the kirk, —  
The Lord of Love came down from above to live with the men who work.  
This is the rose that He planted, here in the thorn-cursed soil, —  
Heaven is blest with perfect rest, but the blessing of Earth is toil."

Access to the heart and soul is through the emotions. To keep these sane and pure, to cultivate them without excess, is the mission of the best drama and fiction. If one's emotions are in ferment, he should be doubly cautious in choosing the books that are sympathetic and will gradually establish sanity and health in the heart. No one can question that the tawdry sentiment and the prurient motives of so many novels and plays of recent years have tended to increase the nervous diseases among women and adolescents. From the enervating emotionalism of current literature one must turn for sympathy which is ever wholesome to the restrained, artistic portrayals of a suffering Kent or Hermione, to Wordsworth's Michael, Browning's Pompilia, or Hawthorne's Dimmesdale. There is contagious health as well as joy in the simple love stories of Rosalind and Viola, Anne Eliot or Lorna Doone, Lady Babbie or Alice of Old Vincennes. Readers as well as writers restrict the cultivation of emotion and sentiment to the narrow limits of the sexual love story. To expand our emotional sympathies we need to select, at times, tales of sentiment that cluster about friendship, self-sacrifice, child life, or some devotion to secret ambition or ideal. Such are found in the tender *contes* by Coppée, Bourget, and Bunner, in the New England tales by Miss

Wilkins and Miss Alice Brown. With grateful memory one recalls such stories in "The Ruling Passion," by Dr. Van Dyke,—"A Lover of Music," "A Brave Heart," and "The Keeper of the Light."

The normal reader has his hours when he corresponds to Coleridge's "sponges," when he is no longer "reading by the hour-glass" nor "seeking for hidden pearls." He does not wish inspiration, information, nor stimulus. He needs relaxation and turns to his book friends for quiet entertainment. Such a mood is worthy of emphatic fostering in these days of stress. Bagehot said, with truth, that even in our reading and recreation "it is essential to the pride of man to believe that he is industrious." With subtle irony Charles Dudley Warner wrote in "Back-Log Studies": "Have you any right to enjoy yourself at all until the fag end of the day, when you are tired and incapable of enjoying yourself?" There is dire need of education in America along the lines of recreation and joy. If you go to a friend's home for rest you are entertained and carried hither and yon, while your wits must be alert in repartee, for your hostess has already announced to her social *coterie* that you are "clever." It is seemingly a cause for apology if one is found resting or relaxing during the hours of most alluring sun-

shine. Even in our pleasures and sports we are rushing, exhausting ourselves in plans and preparations, rivalling each other in accomplishing so many miles of woodland walk or so many points of golf, tennis, "bridge," or "pit." Not without reason has the phrase arisen of "American pleasure-exertions." For literary relaxation we need, not *light reading*, but books which are easily read, which rest us while they entertain. For such easeful hours and moods of passive enjoyment there are scores and varieties of books. Charles Lamb satisfies almost every fluctuation of temperament except that of intense activity. For the restful hours he is unsurpassed in charm and delicate wit. Do you enjoy a reverie? He offers his "Dream-Children." Are you recovering from an illness, and do you feel petulant and languid? You will never forget his portrait of "The Convalescent," with its gentle satire and interwoven courage, if you read it then. Do you have a mild curiosity about his own personality? He is quite willing to gratify such a mood, and confides to you the interesting narratives of "My Relations" and "The Superannuated Man."

Closely linked in memory and position on our imaginary book shelves are other companions for pure delectation, — De Quincey and Goldsmith, Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, Lang and Birrell,

Holmes and "Ik Marvel." Other volumes near at hand should be Curtis's "Essays from the Easy Chair" and Colonel Higginson's "Cheerful Yesterdays," Miss Repplier's "In the Dozy Hours," and Dr. Crothers's genial volume already quoted. If this last essayist had ended his service with "The Honorable Points of Ignorance," it would suffice to bring us a feeling of restful relief when we are hounded by demands upon our limited bureau of information: "To say 'I do not know' is not nearly as painful as it seems to those who have not tried it. The active mind, when the conceit of absolute knowledge has been destroyed, quickly recovers itself and cries out, after the manner of Brer Rabbit when Brer Fox threw him into the brier patch, 'Bred en bawn in a brier patch, Brer Fox, — bred en bawn in a brier patch.'"

For the hours of relaxation there are certain poems which should be kept in grateful remembrance. Heine and Keats have dreamy, sensuous charm. Rossetti is a delight to æsthetic and poetic faculties and his "Sonnets for Pictures," his lyrics, and his tender, mystical fancies of "The Blessed Damozel," "Sister Helen," or "Rose Mary" cast a spell of happy dreamland over our emotions. Longfellow and Stoddard and Eugene Field stir our hearts to domestic content; Tennyson in his earlier visions, like

the soporific "Lotus Eaters" and "The Lady of Shalott," or the homely picture-song of "The Miller's Daughter," lures us to peaceful moods. The clever *vers de société*, by Praed and Dobson, Lang and Locker-Lampson, have a mission in these hours of effortless entertainment. Clinton Scollard reveals to us lethargic scenes in the Orient or gracefully points us to "Hills of Song." That forgotten versifier Herrick should be placed beside these modern singers, for his stanzas are refreshing and seasonable. He explained "When he would have his Verses Read," —

"In sober mornings do not thou rehearse  
The holy incantation of a verse ;  
But when that men have both well drunk and fed,  
Let my enchantments then be sung and read."

Does fiction appeal to you in this mood of inertia? Place in close proximity for use the never failing George Borrow and Jane Austen, Fanny Burney, and Anthony Trollope, Blackmore, and one or two of Black's best tales of coast and heather, and, at the very centre, Dickens, Thackeray, and Howells. Close beside these tested favorites a few later story-tellers with grace and gentle humor have a rightful place, — Daudet, in his exploits of Tartarin; Thomas Hardy, in "Under the Greenwood Tree"

and other early Wessex tales; Barrie, Crockett, and Jane Barlow; Miss Sherwood, who can lure us far from wearisome realities into a modern fairyland, amid classic setting, by her exquisite idyl, "Daphne," or her winsome, allegorical tale of the truant royal lovers. From the scores of American fictionists who have responded generously to the need for wholesome, reposeful stories, one might select for a first list of favorites four women representing different sections of the country, yet all creators of vivid characters and all endowed with delicate, forceful style,—Mrs. Ruth McEnery Stuart, the delightful *raconteur* of Southern episodes; Miss Alice French, who, as "Octave Thanet," has portrayed Western life with strong delineation and rich faith; Mrs. Margaret Deland, whose Miss Maria, Dorothea, and others of "Dr. Lavendar's People" in Old Chester, are companions in intimacy and charm with Mrs. Wiggin's Penelope and Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm.

Sharing in importance with the proper adjustment of reading to the varied moods of the mind,—to activity and depression, to ferment and lethargy,—is the choice of the environment which will aid in gaining the most perfect appreciation. When the sane reader is going on a journey, however brief, he takes with him one

or more books which will enhance his memory of the localities in later years and, at the same time, will unfold new value in some long-familiar or neglected volume. Every one knows that lasting affection for a certain essay, poem, or novel may be traced to the fact that it was read for the first time, or with the first true enjoyment, under circumstances which were relevant. We find ourselves in a region where some famous verse or prose had its inception or scenic motive; we read or reread it there because it is the fashion or it is quoted in the guide-books. To our amazement we find a new charm and we form a lasting friendship with a poem or a meditation, a sketch or a novel, which previously has been but vaguely known. Irving's genial personality sheds a contagious charm through his pages, but he becomes an intimate comrade in spirit to one who reads him beneath the hills of Tarrytown or stands in the quiet churchyard where, —

"A simple stone, with but a date and name,  
Marks his secluded resting-place beside  
The river that he loved and glorified."

'The Last of the Mohicans' is changed in classification from "one of the college requirements" to a vivid recital of a struggle between two races when one rereads the story at Lake George, visits the cave at Glens Falls, where



Uncas and Hawkeye concealed their friends, and follows the trail along the shores of "Horicon" to the site of Fort William Henry and the English barricades.

A tourist who has spent memorable hours on the strange, rocky formations of the Isles of Shoals, whose soul has been stirred by its awesome grandeur, who has paid literary homage before the cottage and perennial flowers cherished by Celia Thaxter, has only half realized the poetic and romantic associations of the scenes unless he has carried with him the pictures of "An Island Garden," the thrilling memories of Hawthorne's visit to the islands, as told in his journals, or the matchless impressions of a poet in "Pictures from Apple-dore":—

"So wide the liveness, so lucid the air,  
The granite beneath you so savagely bare,  
You might well think you were looking down  
From some sky-silenced mountain's crown,  
Whose far-off pines are wont to tear  
Locks of wool from the topmost cloud."

In literary merit the romances of Jane G. Austin will never be extolled but it is fitting that the visitor to Plymouth should find them in vogue, leading the list of colonial tales which illumine for us the scenes of pioneer days in the colony, or awaken to life the heroes whose

graves on old Burial Hill or in adjacent Duxbury are shrines for pilgrims of every class and nation. As one stands beside transparent Walden Pond, a new meaning is given to Thoreau's experiment; one feels a vital sympathy with his mood of seclusion and enjoys more fully his earnest and, at the same time, whimsical narrative of his bean rows and his woodland neighbors, of his hut and its visitors, of his deep, reverential joy in every aspect of each season as it shared its most vital secrets with him. The Blue Ridge of Virginia has been visualized for tourists and readers by the sonnets of Paul Hamilton Hayne. "The Song of the Chattahoochee," the vibrant notes of Tampa robins and mocking-birds, "the length and the breadth and the sweep of the marshes" of the Southland, revive memories of Lanier and his haunting melodies.

Some imaginations fail to respond to new scenes and associations unless stimulated by literary incentive, while the most fertile mind will gain expansiveness from reading history, poetry, and fiction within their natural setting. We always connect in memory certain writings with definite places. Venice suggests the dramatic portraits by Shakespeare, the laments or ecstasies of Byron and Wordsworth, De Musset, Landor, and Shelley. Italy exerted an un-

realized influence upon the lives and verse of many of the Victorian poets. The graves of three are shrines in the land of their sojourn. With rare grace have the qualities of the poets been interwoven with memorial thoughts in Thomas Bailey Aldrich's sonnet, "Three Flowers":—

"Herewith I send you three pressed withered flowers ;  
This one was white, with golden star ; this, blue  
As Capri's cave ; that, purple and shot through  
With sunset-orange. Where the Duomo towers  
In diamond air, and under hanging bower  
The Arno glides, this faded violet grew  
On Landor's grave ; from Landor's heart it drew  
Its magic azure in the long spring hours.  
Within the shadow of the Pyramid  
Of Caius Cestius was the daisy found  
White as the soul of Keats in Paradise.  
The pansy, — there are hundreds of them, hid  
In the thick grass that folded Shelley's mound,  
Guarding his ashes with most lovely eyes."

As the world has commemorated the six hundredth anniversary of Petrarch's birth, one is reminded of the many readers who have been lured to love this poet after visits to his "enchanted valley-retreat" or to his final resting-place at Arquà.

To expand this phase of the subject further would be to exceed all reasonable limits of space. The theme is most elastic and suggestive. To

a large extent this plan of reading consecutively the books which deal with specified places may be followed more effectively at home, in the weeks of preparation or after return from incessant sight-seeing. By such travel-classes at home, acquaintance may be gained with a wide range of volumes, art and biography no less than poetry and fiction. Even such as are denied the delights of travel may share pleasurable excursions in imagination. As a general precept it is wise to adapt our reading to generic environment. We should scarcely choose Burns, Gilbert White, or Miss Wilkins for companions on a crowded city boulevard, nor would we select "The Pit" to disturb us during hours of country quiet. Novels of city life are in the ascendant; some happily combine the elements of city and country in forceful antithesis, noting the effects of each upon mind and soul, as in "Anna Karénina," "A Little Journey in the World," and many of Howells' novels, notably "The Rise of Silas Lapham" and "The Kentons." On first thought one might say that all poetry implied the environment of country or village. To read poetry, much more to write it, in the midst of the tumultuous elements of a huge, money-getting city, seems like a perversion of nature. There are many poems, however, not sufficiently familiar to us unless

called to mind by a special occasion, that portray diverse phases of city life and denounce or extol their influences. Cowper and Samuel Johnson, Byron and Wordsworth, found theme for verse in London life. Matthew Arnold's "East and West London" were prototypes for the vivid, soul-stirring poems of city ambition and misery told to our own day by Stephen Phillips and John Davidson. The earlier and later Knickerbocker poets have embodied in verse different views of Broadway, the ferries, the harbor, and the crowds of New York. Whitman, in prose sketches and poems, has given reality to the ferry-boat and stage-coach and the earlier assimilative elements of the great city. The most sane and pictorial verses by that much-maligned "mad poet," McDonald Clarke, record graphic experiences of Broadway and Bowling Green, of the Battery and old-time hostelrys. If compelled by circumstances to spend the springtime within the brick-walled city, we may gain passing contentment from Bryant's "Spring in Town" and his keen delight in the indirect influence of the season upon the faces and manners of his fellow-travelers upon the highway. With deeper insight he wrote his "Hymn of the City." This is worthy of remembrance as we rush along, intent on catching trains or avoiding collision with the many de-

vices of death in a modern city, wholly forgetful of the lessons of human kindness and faith which should be brought home to us even in the midst of the turmoil:—

“Thy Spirit is around,  
Quickening the restless mass that sweeps along;  
And this eternal sound —  
Voices and footfalls of the numberless throng —  
Like the resounding sea,  
Or like the rainy tempest, speaks of Thee.”

Exception may be taken to these chance hints which associate certain books with specific time and place. There is more than newspaper pleasantry about the poet who writes his ode to June during a fierce December blizzard, or the reader who finds his only cooling draught on a sweltering day in visions of a “tumultuous privacy of storm.” In truth, we often get a shock of the unexpected when we learn that some of the most perfect pictures of the sea or the woods have been only cherished dreams of the poet who is struggling with mercantile life, far away from the sound of the sea or the scent of the meadows. It is yet more tribute to the author’s imaginative skill that he can, under such conditions, transport us with him into ideality. One should not lose enjoyment of Tennyson’s onomatopœic melody in “Break,

Break, Break," when he finds that it was not written in Clevedon, within sound of the roaring waves, but, according to the author's assertion, was composed "in a Lincolnshire lane at five o'clock in the morning." It was difficult to identify Bryant, the poet of "Thanatopsis" and "Planting of the Apple-Tree," with the assiduous, reserved city editor. Richard Henry Stoddard retained to the last his legacy of love for the sea, enhanced by boyhood memories of old Hingham; amid the drudgery and smoke of foundry or dingy office, he sang with yet more tender yearning for the ocean with its vistas. George Eliot's "Scenes from Clerical Life" and her earlier novels of country-folk were far separated in scene and time from her own years, whose memories they recorded, but they were no less vital in characterization and background. Many of our best narratives of plantation life before the war have been written within recent decades by men and women of Southern blood who have been long in residence at the North. Their impressions were indelible, but their sympathies and perspective have been wisely broadened by the years.

Undoubtedly, there are seasons when we crave and should indulge our moods by such reading as is in marked contrast to immediate surroundings of either nature or the incidental world. In

such a mood, with a sensuous poet's memory of the season of darkness and cold, Mr. Aldrich poetizes:—

“Because the sky is blue; because blithe May  
Masks in the wren's note and the lilac's hue:  
Because—in fine, because the sky is blue,  
I will read none but piteous tales to-day,  
Keep happy laughter till the skies be gray,  
And the sad season cypress wears, and rue:  
Then when the wind is moaning in the flue,  
And ways are dark, bid Chaucer make us gay.”

Hope is often revived or ferment is dissipated by a sudden, positive reminder of the unalterable laws and reactions of nature and life. Nothing can be more effective in imaginative and spiritual tonic on a cold, wintry day than a visit to some art exhibit where the predominating tone is one of summer skies and warm, sensuous themes,—a succession of Venetian sketches or some glowing fancies from the Orient. Memory recalls with vividness a day when a wild, freezing blizzard raged without, but within, before a glowing fire, I first enjoyed the mingled wit and philosophy of “My Summer in a Garden.” Under somewhat similar circumstances, in more recent days, have we wandered far from the snow-hidden roads of New England, to companion Elizabeth in her German Garden. One's physical and emotional condition is, at times,



able to recover itself by some volume of absorbing adventure or a well-balanced, alluring tale of love and life which has an anæsthetic effect upon a desperate mood. Stevenson suggested the special mission of a book like "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" when he wrote to Conan Doyle that the story would afford excellent relief for a jumping tooth-ache.

Not unlike the delight of actual vision when, in a few hours, we are transported from bleak climates to tropical blooms, is the responsive joy of an imagination which can exchange January for June through such delicate lyrics of the summer month as those by Philip Henry Savage or Miss Lizette Reese or in the bolder bucolics of James Whitcomb Riley. Is the spring laggard and does faith suffer in the delay? Miss Peabody enters with a blithe song:—

“Wearied one,  
Rest a little in the sun,  
Here is April come behind you  
With a blessing on your head:  
Rains unshed,  
And her loving hands that bind you  
While she queries, “Who am I?”  
Of the darkened eye.  
O, I heard the winter pass!  
Came a sigh from waking grass  
That should wake a daffodilly.  
April, and up-rising now, — and every kind of lily!”  
— *Singing-Leaves*, 1903.

Our grandmothers knew this charm of the visionary summer amid the wintry months; they kept alive geraniums and oxalis and other blossoming plants within the cozy sitting-room windows. Our own homes would lack much of their cheer were we deprived of the palms and ferns, the orange trees and varied flowers, which modern skill can furnish and modern incomes can purchase through the entire year, even in our severe Northern clime. We are no longer content with a few hardy plants. Roses, orchids, carnations, and violets of marvellous size and brilliancy are ours in every month. The floral display at a reception or a dinner often costs as much as the living expenses of our grandfather's family for an entire year. Delighting as we do in these beauties of contrasting seasons, we still know that they are exotics. They do not lessen our intense joy, new every spring, at the first glimpse of the budding willow, the first sprig of arbutus, or the insignificant celandine, which was so tenderly poetized by Wordsworth. Shakespeare was the sane teacher in this respect as in many another :

“Why should proud summer boast  
Before the birds have cause to sing ?  
At Christmas I no more desire a rose,  
Than wish a snow in May's new-fangled mirth ;  
But like of each thing that in season grows.”

— *Richard III.*

As the brilliant flowers of our Northern climate come to us in winter as charming imports, so in imagination we must recognize the exotic character of poems, studies, and sketches of nature when separated from their relevant season. They give us rare happiness by their hopeful suggestion and are strong tonics to our depressed, winter-burdened spirits. On the other hand, the reader who seeks the most perfect accord with nature, who desires that her messages should sink deep into his soul and is not satisfied with mere sensuous contact, will choose his books in harmony with the prevailing expression of sky and tree, of hillsides and streams. Children always return to their games at definite seasons, and each generation repeats the sequence. There is no prohibitive reason why boys should not play marbles or girls jump rope within the gymnasium in winter, but whoever heard of such forcing of the season and reversal of custom? We first realize that spring has come when we meet a group of city boys, in a sunshiny corner of a muddy street, quarreling over the records of their agates and alleys. We may enjoy with defiant zest "The Compleat Angler" or "Little Brothers of the Air" when the rivers and lakes are expanses of solid ice and the snow-birds and sparrows are almost the only representatives of their tribes. Lamb well said of Walton's

volume, "It might sweeten a man's temper at any time to read it." Granting such isolated cases, however, the general experience is to the contrary, — it urges such books, such selected poems or sketches, as shall unfold most fully the secrets and messages of the season which surrounds us. Such method of reading, in the main, will aid us in attaining that harmony of spirit so tenderly voiced in George Meredith's lines, —

"Oh, mother Nature! teach me, like thee,  
To kiss the Season, and shun regrets."

There are a few authors who have so incarnated themselves with all moods and periods of nature, who have intuitively reflected varied changes and laws, that they may be companions on our imaginary library table for the entire calendar year. They bring some new facts in science or some inspiring message for each passing season. Such were St. Francis and Gilbert White, Thomson and Thoreau; such are John Burroughs and Bradford Torrey, whose latest volume of New England nature-lore bears the apt title "Clerk of the Woods." Among the books of American fiction which defy classification, and may be called idyl, romance, or revery, is James Lane Allen's "A Kentucky Cardinal." For beauty of form and insight of soul this ear-

lier work has not been surpassed by his later novels. It is a pathetic nature idyl, it is a tender love story, but it is also more, — it is a poet's record of the glories and subtleties of nature during a year and a half of her caprices and natural changes. Within each chapter we hear music, — the music of the birds in the springtime, the music of the crickets and cicadas in the hazy summer, the music of the hickory logs in the autumn fireplaces, and the music of the books whispering to the ear of the spirit during the cold winter months, — "But the finest music in the room is that which streams out of the ear of the spirit in many an exquisite strain from the hanging shelf of books on the opposite wall! Every volume there is an instrument which some melodist of the mind created and set vibrating with music, as a flower shakes its perfume or a star shakes out its light. Only listen, and they soothe all care, as though the silken-soft leaves of the poppies had been made vocal and poured into the ear" (p. 5). From the depth of February cold, with "nature at low tide," through boisterous March, whose winds cannot kill the venturesome snowdrop and willow, over the swift April days when "nature is finishing her house-cleaning," into the full glory of July warmth and August stillness, the poet-romancer allures his readers. He pictures the time of fruitage and

then of decay, never losing faith in the revitalizing processes, never forgetting our possible services for the stray birds during the bleak months. We, too, may open "a pawn-broker's shop for our hard-pressed brethren in feathers, lending at a fearful rate of interest; for every borrowing Lazarus will have to pay us back in due time by monthly instalments of singing."

Among many aids to æsthetic and spiritual culture from the pen of Philip Gilbert Hamerton there is one seldom mentioned, but of value to our present thought. It is his edition of "The Sylvan Year, or Leaves from the Note-Book of Raoul Dubois." In spite of local setting, so broad is its interpretation of nature's movements and aspects throughout the year that it will bring inspiration to every lover of either the woods or the poets. The imaginary hero, modeled after Obermann, with less of ennui, unfolds his heart and soul under the influence of these sylvan comrades. The year begins in November, with the despoiled trees, contrasting in memory Dante's dirge for the suffering forests with Emerson's buoyant assertion of "the perpetual youth" and protecting kindness of the woods in every season. The sojourner finds new beauties in the clinging leaves of oak and beech, in the filmy magic of the hoar frost. With keen observation, stimulated by a poet's

fancy, he wakens his emotions and mind to new life, as the streams begin to ripple, the seeds to sprout, and the signs of spring, — “a hope more than a visible reality,” — reach their culmination in the full chorus of birds and their joyous nest-building. This season, chosen by the artist for the beginning of his study of the sylvan year, is by no means inappropriate though it is unusual. We are accustomed to think of the spring season as the proper, if not the only time, in which to familiarize ourselves with foliage and flowers, to observe minutely the changing forms and tints of grass and wayside sedges. Those who have studied the trees in their bareness have discovered unrealized beauties and laws in their development. We are too forgetful that winter has also a music if we keep the heart responsive and the ear attuned. George Meredith has well echoed such remembrance in his “Song in the Songless” : —

“They have no song, the sedges dry,  
And still they sing.  
It is within my breast they sing,  
As I pass by.  
Within my breast they touch a string,  
They wake a sigh.  
There is but sound of sedges dry;  
In me they sing.”

— *A Reading of Life*, N.Y. 1901, p. 63.

We quote at length poetic farewells to departing winter and ecstasies on spring. The very air invites us into its joy, we have less need for books to cheer and inspire us. We do not "wonder what we shall read" for a definite programme in the spring season. That inquiry comes in the autumn with the longer evenings and the shut-in days. Then it was our grandfathers gathered their few books around the evening lamp and *read* with sympathy and calm delight. As the season approaches, we seldom plan out a specific course of personal reading for information or delectation, but we organize our classes for *study*, we fix dates for lectures from which our memories may absorb a few thoughts that we may express intelligently the next day. Much time is consumed in drawing up by-laws and arranging for "teas," which are such essential features of modern literary culture.

Just at this season when one's spirit rebels, perchance, at the drear, prospective months of cold and storm, at the interruption to sports and walks, to daily companionship with nature, there is special need of such reading as will silence the complaints and give sane appreciation of the winter. We need the books which will open our senses and minds to neglected observations and give us the fitting spirit to



sympathize with and to find compensating joy in the season. There are many poems and essays which strike the key-note of winter's music, that will invigorate and readjust our sentiments. There are many sad moans over the advent of winter in the poetry of the past, but the vital contact of the present with nature, in all her phases, has borne result in the insight and sympathy of later writings. To Thomson, winter was aged and shriveled with "a desolated prospect," whose "power of Philosophic Melancholy" only depressed the soul. In contrast recall Whittier's merry challenge to "The Frost Spirit" or listen again to a few sentences from Lowell's "A Good Word for Winter": "For my own part I think Winter a pretty wide-awake old boy, and his bluff sincerity and hearty ways are more congenial to my mood, and more wholesome for me, than any charms of which his rivals are capable. . . . But Winter has his delicate sensibilities too, only he does not make them as good as indelicate by thrusting them forever in your face. He is better poet than Autumn when he has a mind, but, like a truly great one as he is, he brings you down to your bare manhood, and bids you understand him out of that, with no adventitious helps of association, or he will none of you." — *My Study Windows*, pp. 26, 27.

The winter landscape makes special appeal to our eyes and minds if we recall the glow of color and tracery of the leaves pictured by Emerson and Bryant, Longfellow and Piatt. A stray robin sounds his far-off call, and with Mr. Aldrich we rejoice :—

“So give thanks at Christmas-tide;  
Hopes of spring-time yet abide!  
See, in spite of darksome days,  
Wind and rain and bitter chill,  
Snow, and sleet-hung branches, still  
The robin stays !”

The spirit of the winter is energy and vigorous hope rather than gloom and inertia, as so often misread. Its winds and snow should invigorate, should suggest new vitality for mind and soul. If moods of depression recur with the cold and darkness, we need more fuel for our emotions and our spirits. The dominant trait of the season is that of latent activity. It is ushered in by holidays of rejoicing and sportiveness. Around the firelight dance the shadows of fairies and fancies. It will do us good to reread again the “Arabian Nights” and similar extravaganzas. Shakespeare’s action dramas, historical and personal, make appeal at this season. Histories of conquest, ballads of Scott and Lockhart, romances of the wholesome sort, Scott and Cooper, Dumas and Stevenson, are in

order. Fiction of movement and energy, typified in "The Day's Work," "Caleb West," or "The Battle Ground," fit in with the mood of ambition and courage which the healthy individual recognizes as the underlying spirit of winter. The months have even a regal aspect as they tyrannically sweep over the earth. John Vance Cheney has well embodied this thought in his personification of January : —

"Say it, my Winds, — was never king but me !  
Say it, and say the king is on his throne,  
His lords about him. Rouse, lords, you, mine own,  
Up, great of heart ; your king — a king is he —  
Would take his topmost hour of royalty !"

— *Out of the Silence*, 1897, p. 57.

If we enter with zest into the moods of the winter, finding melody in its winds and delight in its brilliant skies or sereness, if we appreciate its egress with a few last notes of triumph, we shall be more in harmony with the first sign of transferred reign from energizing winter to gentle spring. Though we may the more rejoice in the new birth and awakening of the world, let us not forget that such a joy could only come after the months of gestation. We have reason to join not alone in the outward signs of rejoicing but also in the manifold notes of poets from Solomon's joyful ode to the latest effusion of some current author. With new enthusiasm

we take down our books of information on wild flowers, birds, plant formations, and allied topics. In our *study* let us not neglect to *read* the messages of the poets and the dreamers. Amiel expressed with force this need of every heart and soul: "True poetry is truer than science, because it is synthetic, and seizes at once what the combination of all the sciences is able at most to attain as a final result. The soul of nature is divined by the poet; the man of science only serves to accumulate materials for its demonstration."—*Amiel's Journal*, i., p. 66.

The reader of Browning's "Home-Thoughts from Abroad" responds to the yearning heart of the poet and sees, with clearer vision than any actual observation could give, the first tiny leaf on the elm tree :—

"in England;  
Now that April's there,"—

he hears with soulful ear the May-day calls of  
the white-throats and the swallows and,—

"The wise thrush ; he sings each song twice over,  
Lest you should think he never could recapture  
The first fine careless rapture!"

Each successive flower in its venturesome beauty should suggest to memory one or more of the poets. Herrick and many a later versifier has

almost a complete list of flower lays from violets and daffodils to roses and asters. The daffodil especially recalls Shakespeare and Wordsworth, the daisy has been poetized by many a successor of Burns, narcissus is associated with Keats, the rhodora with Emerson, the dandelion with Lowell. In contrast with the latter's happy homily is the simple allegory of Father Tabb on the same common flower : —

“ With locks of gold to-day ;  
To-morrow, silver gray ;  
Then blossom-bald. Behold,  
O man, thy fortune told.”

So gradual is the change from spring to summer that we are not conscious of any definite division of the seasons. The trees have put forth leaf and bud, the birds have come one by one, and then in groups. We hear first an occasional note of bluebird and vireo and hasten to tell our neighbor of the good fortune, as if such a happening came once in a lifetime instead of every year. Then we hear the lovers calling to each other as they select and build their nests, until, in May, when “ the sun sheds an amber light,” the air is vocal with their music. Above the fields which were so flat and barren a few weeks ago wave tall stocks ; we realize again how sure yet imper-

ceptible is the process of growth, — “First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.” The sight may stir our faith to echo with Lanier the hope that we, —

“Take Time’s strokes as softly as this morn  
Takes waving of the corn.”

The perfumes of the summer-time are full of poetic allurements. The subtle odor of the blossoms, however, is less permeating and suggestive than the strong whiffs of fragrance from the harvest fields. It is not strange that poets from Hesiod and Virgil to our own day have celebrated, in picture and idyl, the beauties of the harvest. Many a modern writer has portrayed the delights of such rural sights and sounds. Richard Watson Gilder has sung a blithe “Midsummer Song,” Andrew Lang, a “Scythe Song,” and Crockett, an “Idyll of the Hayfield,” with a merry, rhythmic refrain. Lloyd Mifflin has blended the sounds of the scythe and the wain, the meadow streams and the locusts, the lowing of the cattle and the voice of the farmer in his sonnet, “Summer Sounds”:—

“One listening in the clover fields can hear  
The mower whet his scythe; and far away,  
O’er lowlands redolent with the new-mown hay,  
The rattle of the reaper sharp and clear.  
Across the reedy stretches of the mere  
The grazing horses send their greeting neigh;

While, 'mid the silences throughout the day,  
The locust's sharp staccato stabs the ear.  
Dim shimmering in the heat the violet hills  
Call to us vaguely from a realm of dreams,  
And from the meadow's smooth meandering streams,  
Come muffled murmurs of the distant mills;  
From upland wheat-fields, as his barns he fills,  
We hear the farmer, calling to his teams."

— *The Slopes of Helicon*, 1898.

Not alone in verse, but in a variety of prose romances and sketches, is reproduced the atmosphere of the drowsy, redolent summer days. We have no disposition to read novels of action or exertion. More in accord with the season and our moods are "As You Like It" and "The Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Vicar of Wakefield" and "Cranford," Miss Mitford's "Our Village" and Miss Austen's "Mansfield Park." Scores of American volumes suggest themselves for this season of summer silence and lethargy, — "Mosses from an Old Manse," "My Farm of Edgewood," "In Arcady," "The Silent Places." Among recent narratives none surpasses in delicacy, in sympathy with nature and humanity, Miss Jewett's "The Country of the Pointed Firs," with its background of Maine island and shore and its odors of spicy pennyroyal.

Summer is not fully a part of our lives unless we combine in actuality, or in imagination, land beauties with the glorious, ever changing aspects

of the sea and its invigorating breath. Whitman as a poet is best appreciated by one who, at such a time, reads passages from his prose sketches, "Specimen Days." The paradox may not be irrelevant in the case of this author. His memory of "A July Afternoon by the Pond" is more familiar, but has more animalism interwoven with the poetry than the sketches of "The Oaks and I," "Sun-Down Lights," and the reverie under the starry heavens, well titled "Hours for the Soul." Waves in their quiet and their turmoil, the varied tints of inlets and open waters, the rush of the storm clouds across the horizon, have furnished pictures for many a familiar poem and chapter of romance. The rising of the sea fog and its reflected thoughts have been traced in the poetry of Heine and Tennyson, Stoddard and Bayard Taylor, Scollard and Burton. In his "Sea Pictures" the last-named poet has given new vision to our glimpses "Off the Haven":—

"Up stole a fog, a chill and ghastly thing,  
That gloomed the sea and hid her face from me ;  
My soul was like a bird with broken wing ;  
A dismal bell warned homing barks away.

"Then shot a sun-shaft ; like a phantom host,  
Born of the night and mailed in sullen white,  
The river mists drew off and lo ! the coast  
Lay green and glad beyond the waters gray."



The first glimpses of the goldenrod, aster, and gentian fill us often with sadness rather than with joy in their beauty and messages. We say, "Summer is gone ; the autumn is here, for these are its symbols." Many of the late flowers are luxuriant in hue and graceful in form beyond any of the earlier blossoms. Why should we lose full appreciation of their splendor in the thought that they herald that season so wrongfully called "the death of the year"? Our memories retain many songs of flowers of spring and summer, but we are less familiar with the poetic thoughts incited by the beauty of autumn. Symonds' ode "To Chrysanthemums," Mrs. Deland's "Goldenrod," Mrs. Jackson's "Goldenrod and Asters," Bryant's "To the Fringed Gentian," are examples in variety. Emily Dickinson has told in unique form her conceit of the birth of the gentian; with yet more charming fancy Edith Thomas has poetized the same flower : —

"Once to the Angel of Birds far up in the rippling air,  
From low on the sun-loved earth the Angel of Flowers  
breathed a prayer :  
Four plumes from the bluebird's wing — and I'll make me  
something rare.

"Four plumes from the bluebird's wing, as fast to the South  
he flew !  
The Angel of Flowers caught them up as they fell in the  
autumn dew,

And shaped with a twirl of her fingers this spire of  
feathery blue."

— *Fair Shadow Land*, p. 83.

Thoreau's "Autumn" will be a helpful guide at this season, combining scientific data with the intuitive reflections of the seer-poet. With the strenuous, incessant life of the present, that has no protracted rest-periods until collapse is imminent, it is especially difficult to realize the message of the seasons of autumn and winter. We cannot easily grasp the mission of the falling leaves, the long autumn rains, the shortened days, and frosty nights. Our scientific training has enabled us to understand the processes of nature, but our moods and souls need more intimate contact with the vital truths which underlie the changes. These may be gleaned from a poet's insight. Walking along the highway near Pisa, and watching the west wind as it whirled the autumn leaves in his pathway, Shelley conceived the thought of that matchless ode which blends so perfectly the true meaning of the season and all seasons with the spirit which should respond in humanity:—

"Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:  
What if my leaves are falling like its own!  
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

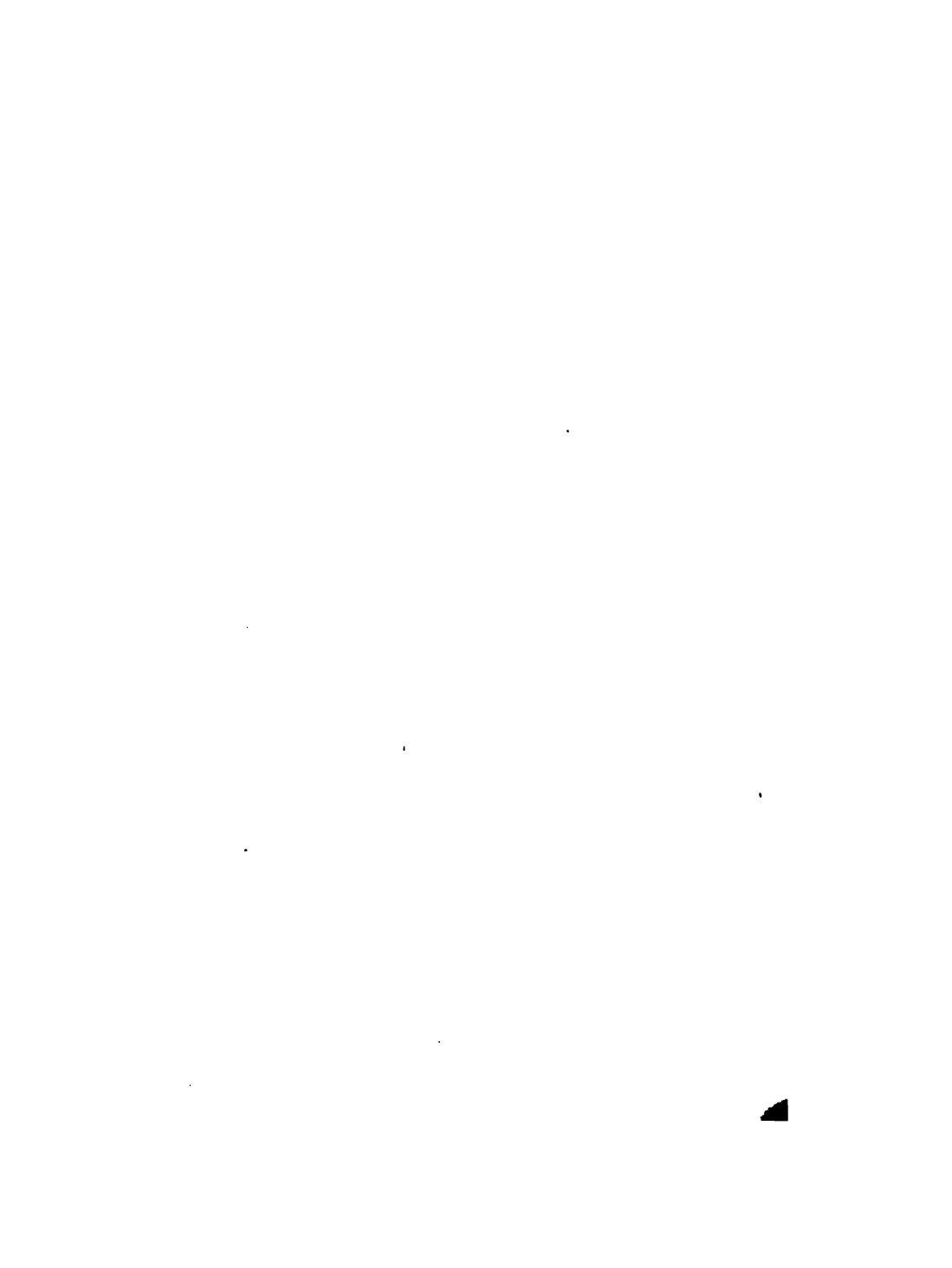
"Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,  
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, spirit fierce,  
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

"Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,  
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth !"

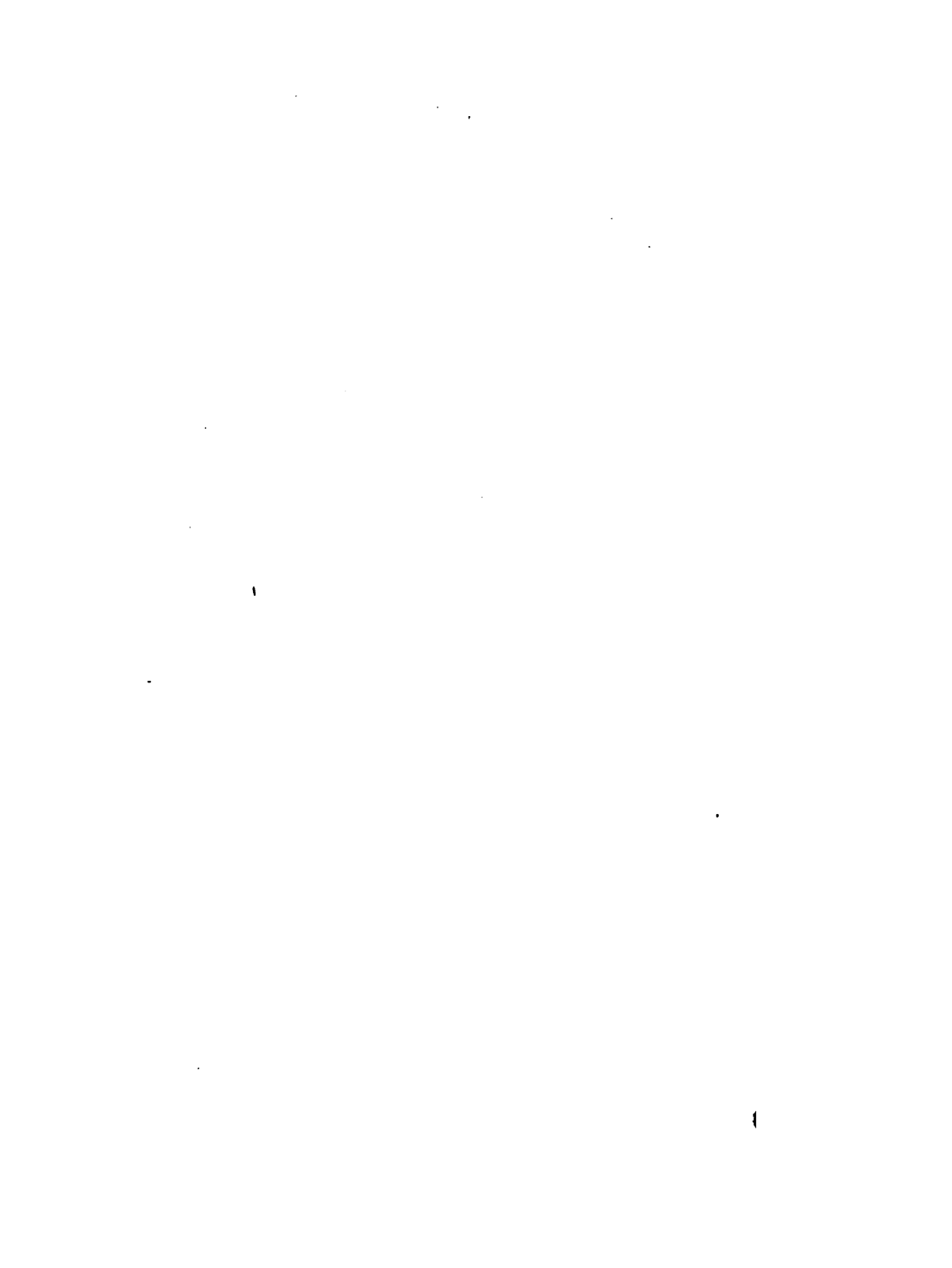
The petulant but deep-souled Landor voiced a similar meditation on the autumn : —

"Fast fall the leaves ; this never says  
To that, ' Alas ! how brief our days ! ' .  
All have alike enjoyed the sun,  
And each repeats, ' So much is won ! ' "

In this sketchy outline of thought it has been possible only to suggest a few of the many authors and books that will assist us to enter more fully into the spontaneous and sequential aspects of nature and to sympathize with more wisdom in the natural moods of the mind, emotions, and soul. To choose his reading so that it may be temperate, so that it may harmonize with the phases of the outer world, so that it may expand and, at the same time, recuperate all his tissues, will be the ultimate motive of every sane reader. By such refreshment we regain our foiled ideals and approach a more noble attitude toward life, whatever may be the outward season or however perplexing may be the ebb and flow of the human current.







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